DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 070 112 CS 500 055

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TITLE	Behavioral Research and the First Year Instructor.
PUB DATE	72
NOTE	9p.; Paper presented at the Central States Speech Assn. Convention (Chicago, 1972)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Behavioral Science Research; *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Communication Skills; *Educational Objectives; *Interaction; Student Centered Curriculum; Student Participation; Teacher Responsibility
IDENTIFIERS	*Speech Communication Education

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the behavioral science approach to speech communication education. The focus of a fundamentals course in communication processes is based upon receiver activity. Studying people as receivers and senders of messages includes emphasis on: (1) intra-personal communication--the individual and his/her internalization of his/her communicative apparatus; (2) inter-personal communication--persons in intimate and small-group situations; and (3) public communication--persons in mass public situations where communication is influencing many directly and indirectly through radio, television, film and public meetings. The author concludes that if the ability to interact and communicate more effectively is to be developed, it is the instructor's responsibility to devise a program that enables students to define, design, and determine their own learning goals. The author illustrates how to realistically apply communication behavioral research in the classroom to achieve a learning environment of this type. (Author/LG)

ED 070112

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BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH AND THE FIRST YEAR INSTRUCTOR

I would like to preface my remarks on behavioral research with the principle determinant that encouraged me to make the transition from public speaking to behavioral research. While a graduate assistant at Northern Illinois University I had the fortunate or unfortunate experience to learn more about the male anatomy in class. One of my male students for a visual aids speech disrobed. He contended he was being innovative - so was I. That was the last public speaking course I taught. Public speaking has definite drawbacks - ex. the bizarre incident I had in class, the Dale Carengie promises for eloquent orators, correcting Silly Sally's sibilant "s", and the parlimentarian pitfalls.

The behavioral science approach to speech communication has endeavored to retire the eclectic discipline of public speaking. The communication theory departments have thus armoured their students with the minimum complexities of jargon, statistics, cybernetics, models and theories from non-verbal communication to congruity hypotheses. However, the basic training for classroom combat has been sorely neglected. After a student becomes indoctrinated with the sacred theories of communication, what happens to him when he is forced to speak English instead of jargonese in the real world? How does he maintain balance when he must practically apply communication theory in the classroom? The major thrust of my remarks is to illustrate from the viewpoint of a first year community college instructor how to realistically apply communication behavioral research in the classroom.

As a community college instructor in my first semester I had approximately one hundred thirty students. Twenty-five younger than I - the rest older. For the most part housewives with an average family size fo five. No matter what

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assignment I gave, the mothers had at least five good reasons why theirs couldn't be completed on time. The men periodically changed shifts - so those I had in the morning I would have at night and vice versa. Occasionally 4 or 5 year olds would frequent the class when it was mommy's turn for the nursery car pool, or better yet the strange incident that happened one day. I wrote the letters C A T on the blackboard; prepared to talk about symbolization, perception, and meaning. I viewed C A T from the perspective that I was about to relate a story illustrating two different individuals' reactions to a quadruped, furry, feline - cat. When I asked the students what that symbol suggested they responded, "caterpillar". I live in Peoria where just about everyone works for Caterpillar or Cat. To say the least it was momentarily unnerving and henceforth laughable.

This community college instruction is different from teaching two classes at Northern Illinois University as a graduate assistant where the students were basically freshmen and teenagers out of high school. The Northern students adjusted to the behavioral science approach to communication more readily than did the mothers who had expectations of becoming silver tongued gossippers or avid Wallace campaigners.

My community college students' first reaction to the behavioral approach was that I was unorthodox, and unethical. As the semester wore on the students agreed 90% that terminology was far too challenging and that English would be a definite improvement over jargone[illegible]et at the completion of the course they agreed to the tune of about 98% that they felt they learned more about communication through a behavioral science approach than they would have from public speaking.

This semester I have the reverse population - more younger and fewer older. They made the adjustment to a behavioral approach in the first few class sessions with little or no difficulties but I approached the problems of presentation differently. I'm still in contention for the "un" award. I'm unethical,

unprofessional, unorthodox, and unAmerican. Basically because I believe and adhere to the following approach to the fundamental's course at Illinois Central College.

I think for the most part we can agree the focus of a fundamentals course in communication processes should be based upon receiver activity. That is studying people as receivers and senders of messages including emphasis on:

a) intra-personal communication - the individual and his internalization of his communicative apparatus,

b) inter-personal communication - persons in intimate and small group situations and

c) public communication - persons in mass public situations where communication is influencing many directly and indirectly through radio - television - film - and public meetings.

For the best results in teaching speech communication I feel the teacher needs to develop a program "that increasingly puts into the students' hands the responsibility for defining their own goals, seeking their own information, developing their own strategy and design for learning and determining their own methods of evaluation."[1] Our educational purpose should be to develop people who are able to interact with one another effectively. I believe the following points will support this premise of interaction. Basically instructors of speech - communication behavioral research - should strive for:

1. Understanding. There is a need to have students understand why a behavioral approach to communication. Are we able to answer - What do we mean by the behavioral sciences? How are we to approach human behavior? Why is it important? Answers to these questions and approaches to teaching speech communication are strictly individual.
2. Simplicity. We all contend that we get rather verbose and complex in trying to explain communication. Looking at the number of definitions

[1] John W. Keltner, Interpersonal Speech Communication, Instructor's Manual, Belmont, California, Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc., 1970, p. 8.

for communication and the models to match makes you wonder why we aren't striving for simplicity! For too long we have been reaching for minimum complexities but missing the simplistic.

Take a look at the following definition of communication. "by 'communication' shall be meant any occurrence involving a minimum of four sequential ingredients: (1) a generator of a (2) sign-symbol systems which is (3) projected to (4) at least one perceiver who assigns it meaning....we are primarily concerned with the human organism's involvement in terms of his sign-symbol behavior." (Robert S. Goyer) My students voted this definition from their text the most difficult to understand, because it their words, "It is too long and involved." "It uses words not generally used in everyday conversation and the meaning is not clear." "Fairly long - could have said same thing more simply." What is simplistic and easily understandable about it? To those versed in communication research it is clearly understandable. But what about students untrained in communication theory? I don't know why we feel we need to impress people with words that mean little or nothing to the average layman. The teaching field isn't a vocation where we spend time impressing people with what we know. It should be an exercise in expression of ideas.

3. Independent Thinking. There is a definite need for creative and critical thinking to take place in the classroom. We need an atmosphere to develop the process of knowing, which includes the process of behaving. Never before has the general public been so keenly aware of the need for critical thinking with the increased involvement of the average person in national and international affairs through modern mass media. More and more people debate issues crucial to our nation. Many are looking for a

solution. For example, people need to find an answer to the problems associated with the Viet Nam war. Yet the proposed solutions are polar in scope. How can the average person begin to think critically rather than entertaining thinking substitutes such as emotion, or prejudice, or conjecture? There seems to be a need for a greater emphasis on the practicality of thinking. Too many people have sorely neglected reasoning and logic. Their approach to communication would hardly fall under the Aristotlean logos, pathos and ethos - but under the contemporary egos, apathos, prejudose - being interpreted: ego, apathy, prejudice. Too many students tend to be on ego trips using themselves and those they have contact with as primary sources of "factual" information. Then again you have students who are passively indifferent and who latently endeavor to withhold information. And lastly the Archie Bunkers who support all their comments with every known prejudice. As we understand the basic strategy for behavioral science we find it calls for explicit reasoning, rigorous evidence, and the essential feature is that any statement, to be scientific must be consistent simultaneously with that reasoning and evidence. The value of science lies not in what it proves to be true, but in what it proves to be untrue.

4. Clarity. I. A. Richards suggested that we "should concentrate on the avoidance of misunderstanding." In striving for clarity in communicating ideas we help to eliminate the communication breakdown nemesis. Understanding, simplicity, and independent thinking are all stepping stones in this direction. For a student ot react favorably to an unclear speech is unthinkable. Clarity is the criterion for speech communication not a criterion. It is itself the end not a means.
5. Meaning. In speech communication probably one of the most useful

methods of measurement is to determine whether there is any congruency between the meaning that a speaker is trying to arouse and the meaning that is aroused in the listener. There is a need to have students understand that perception is individual and it implies meaning. This seems to be an obvious fact but few students are willing at first glance to accept it. My example of the cat is generally supportive evidence.

6. Open classroom atmosphere. The problem of understanding each other, of extracting information from each other, and of producing and dealing with feedback for instance can be accomplished only through actual experience, with particular attention being paid to the process. Sensitivity to self and others cannot be developed by reading or from lectures. The principle can be applied and confirmed by reading and by lectures - but the behavioral experience can come only through doing it. For example, a suggestion from a teacher's handbook for SPEECH COMMUNICATION by Wm Brooks recommends the following perception exercise. "Plan an incident in class. Two persons in class may be involved in the incident and then both can be asked to leave the room; or one person may rush into the room and become involved in an exchange, with you, the teacher, or with another student. Following the incident, each student can be asked to write down what happened and to describe fully the persons involved. The reports can then be compared and discussed."[2] Out of curiosity I decided to try this perception exercise with my department coordinator Don Marine. We planned to do an impromptu skit for my class. We didn't state our intent in definite verbal terms except for the fact that before the students left they would know that it was

[2] William D. Brooks, Instructional Strategies to Accompany Speech Comm., Dubuque, Iowa, Wm C. Brown Co., 1971, p. 3.

a staged perception exercise. While I was teaching class Don walked in and confronted me with my negligence to put a PO number on a requisition. A hassle ensued. Don left and a few minutes later returned and said he just couldn't forget my neglect. I left the class. When I returned one of the students met me crying in the hall. She was embarrassed and concerned for me. I was able to quiet her but when I walked into the room, the students had left. Here are a few of their perceptions . . . . .

"An outraged imbecile disrupted a class that was paid for by us, the students, and tried to embarrass our teacher."

"Perception of Department Head. It blew my mind! I feel like crying for her. What a Bastard! If it was really true. I don't understand whats going on. Why would he do that in front of the class?"

"Department chairman raised hell about P.O. number because of lack of knowledge on your behalf."

"Department chairman seemed rude, unkind and lacking in professional ethics. However, the scene came on too strong to be in touch with reality - in other words-good acting on both your parts."

"Genelle takes off her jacket."

"That chairman of yours was most embarrassing. I don't care who was on his butt, he should not have performed in such an unruley manner for a man of his position."

"You forgot to fill out an order properly so you had to leave class to to complete it."

These six points suggest not an idealistic and unattainable state but a progressive and realistic measure for the success of speech communication as a behavioral science.

The particular subject matter of speech communication comes into being only in the experience of the student. The output of the course is behavior and understanding. The open classroom creates a relationship with students that makes them partners in a mutual effort to reveal their own needs and to seek ways of meeting these needs. As I have mentioned before my courses have been different in populace. No class is taught the same way twice - it can't be. There are no single set methods that have been discovered that will serve all learning and all needs. Our emphasis should be placed on the role of the individual - broadening his understanding and perception of himself and others. The instructor should try to create an atmosphere that encourages students to confront and reveal themselves through speech communication - helping students learn <u>how</u> to think about their communication behavior instead of <u>what</u> to think about it. Our central thrust in speech communication behavioral research should be learning and growth for students and instructors.[3] My first year isn't over but it has been enlightening and I'm looking forward to my second with an energetic and uncomplicated approach.

[3] Kettner, <u>op.cit.</u>, pp. 4-5.

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